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BUREAU of MANA INVESTIGATION

ISSUE 1

BY SMUDGE GARCIA

VOLUME 1



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"Until we find the thief, I'm declaring Martian Law!"

BUREAU OF MANA INVESTIGATION

CHAPTER THREE

SMUDGE - ED GARCIA

BACK COVER - BARON ENGEL

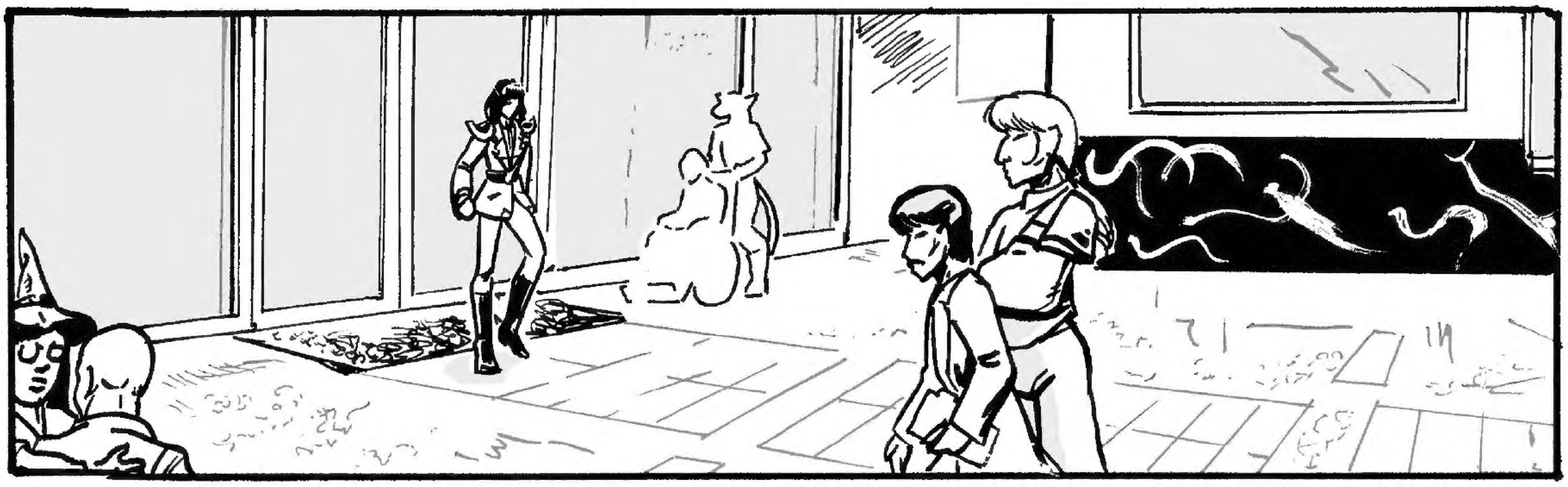
GUEST ILLO - CHRIS MCKINNLEY

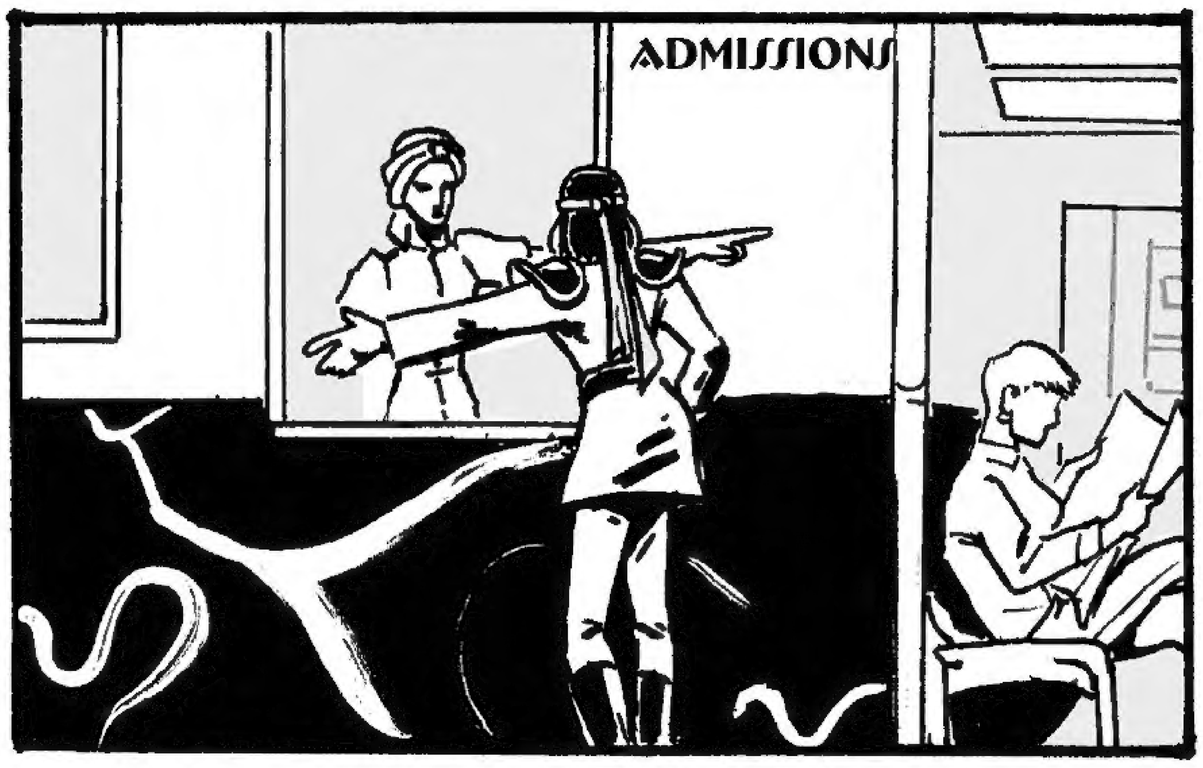
Great Car, Lousy Logo

Squiggle

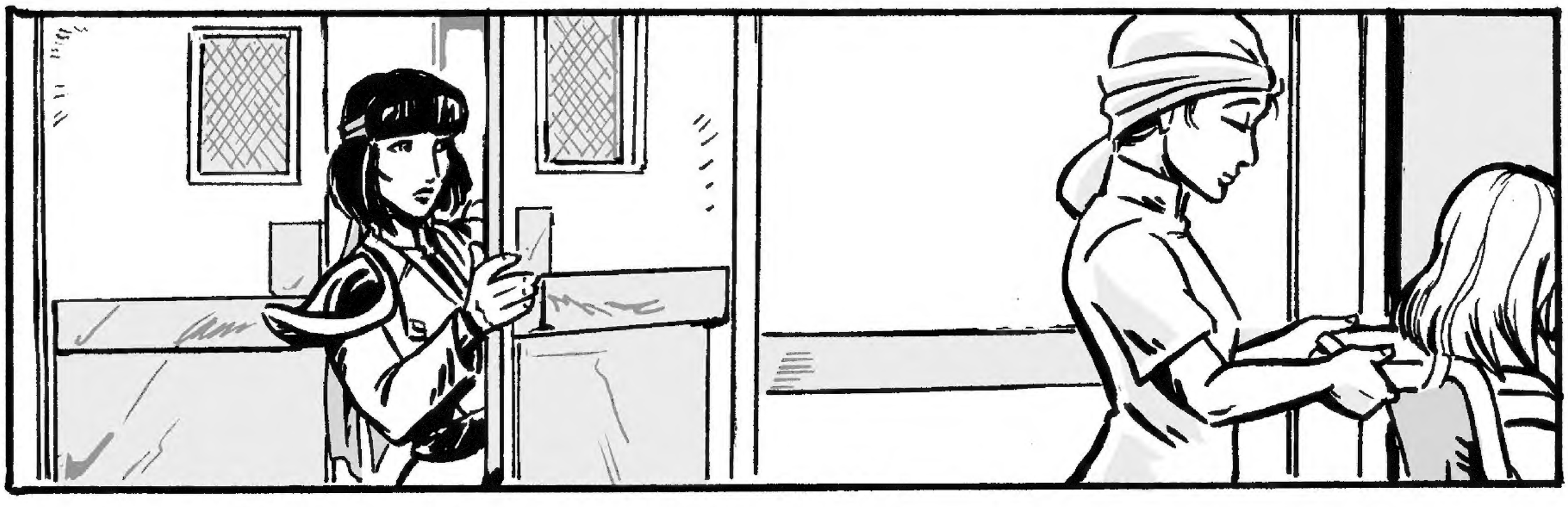
MEGA-SHAMARK Museum of Fine Art ALL DAY






ADMISSIONS


ADMISSIONS



HYGRON?

I AIN'T DEAD YET.

I CAME AS SOON AS I HEARD THE DISPATCHER.

WHAT HAPPENED?

FOUND THE SUCCUBUS.

I CAN SEE THAT.

WE TRACKED HER TO THE REGENCY HOTEL OVER IN COVEBOROUGH.

AMARK AND I ATTAINED A WARRANT AND SET UP AN AMBUSH FOR HER.

AMARK?! WHAT WAS HE DOING THERE?

I THOUGHT HE AND HOLLY WERE HAVING A TALK!

KINDA HARD TO HAVE A HEART-TO-HEART WHEN YOUR GIRL'S BEEN POSSESSED.

WAIT. DON'T TELL ME. YOU TWO DIDN'T BOTHER TELLING THE JUDGE THAT WHEN YOU GOT THE WARRANT. . .

IT, UH, KIND OF SLIPPED OUR MINDS?

WHERE'S AMARK AND YOUR BACKUP NOW?

PROBABLY STILL AT THE SCENE.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT JAR-HEAD THIS TIME!?!

AH, THAT WOULD BE MY PERSONAL PHYSICIAN.

GET WELL SOON, HYGRON.

HELL, I SHOULD JUMP OUT OF WINDOWS MORE OFTEN IF THAT'S WHAT I GET.

THAT LOOKS LIKE A SHOTGUN.

PROBABLY.

THERE'S A SAFE HOUSE AT THE END OF THE STREET.

THINK YOUR MAGIC WILL GET US THERE WITHOUT BEING SPOTTED?

Look elsewhere

There's nothing here of interest to you.

WHERE'S THAT KEY?...

AH-HAH!

Other things call your attention.

HURRY INSIDE, AMARK, BEFORE WE'RE NOTICED.

WHEW! THAT WAS AN ADVENTURE!

Light.

YOU HUNGRY? I'M PECKISH.

I'LL SEE IF THERE'S SOMETHING WE CAN SNACK ON.

PROTECTION RUNES.

WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO REST HERE FOR A BIT.

I FOUND SOME DRIED FRUIT AND CLEAN WATER.

HOLLY, WHAT'S GOING ON?

YOU'VE JUST SUCCESSFULLY LED US ACROSS THIS STRANGE LAND OF DEMONS LIKE YOU'VE BEEN HER SEVERAL TIMES BEFORE.

LIKE YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW.

LIKE YOU'D REALLY CARE!

HOLLY. I'M GOING TO SIT DOWN AND LISTEN TO YOU.

WILL YOU AT LEAST BE HONEST TO ME?

=SIGH=

WHERE TO BEGIN? . . .

LOOK OUTSIDE THE WINDOW.

DON'T WORRY. THERE ARE RUNES THAT KEEP PEOPLE FROM VIEWING THE INSIDE.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

POVERTY. IT'S LIKE A THIRD-WORLD COUNTRY.

YES.

BUT I ALSO SEE A PEOPLE THAT WANT A CHANCE AT SOMETHING BETTER.

WHEN I WAS IN COLLEGE, I WAS POSSESSED BY A SUCCUBUS.

SHE WAS ON THE RUN AND TERRIFIED. I FELT SORRY FOR HER AND TRIED TO HELP, BUT IN THE END SHE WAS KILLED BY HER OWN KIND. SHE WANTED TO START A NEW LIFE IN MEGA-SHAMMARK BUT WASN'T GIVEN THE CHANCE.

I TRIED TO PUT HER OUT OF MY MEMORY.

DID A PRETTY GOOD JOB TOO.

TWO YEARS LATER, I WAS POSSESED AGAIN. SHE, HOWEVER, WAS A COMPLETE BITCH.

TOOK THREE MONTHS FOR THE AUTHORITIES TO CATCH UP WITH HER AND GET HER TO RELEASE ME.

YOU AND I MET AT THE TRIAL.

I REMEMBER. UM, SORRY TO INTERRUPT, BUT HOW MANY TIMES *HAVE* YOU BEEN POSSESSED?

INCLUDING THIS LAST TIME, FIVE.

FIVE?!!

I'M A MEDIUM. YOU'VE SAID SO YOURSELF. MAGICAL THINGS JUST TEND TO SEEK ME OUT.

DURING THE TRIAL, I THOUGHT LONG AND HARD ABOUT THE FIRST SUCCUBUS. WHY WAS SHE SO KIND TO ME? AFTER ALL, SHE WAS A DEMON JUST LIKE THE SECOND, RIGHT?

THEN IT HIT ME. DEMONS WERE JUST PEOPLE, JUST LIKE US.

BEING GOOD OR EVIL WAS A PERSONAL CHOICE, NOT A MANDATE OF NATURE.

THEN I BUMPED INTO SHARRDAN.

HE JUST STROLLED INTO THE DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION LIKE NOTHING WAS WRONG.

HE IGNORED EVERYONE ELSE AND WALKED STRAIGHT UP TO ME.

I WASN'T SURE WHAT TO MAKE OF HIM. ON ONE HAND, I REMEMBERED THAT FIRST SUCCUBUS, ALONE, SCARED, RUNNING FOR HER LIFE, WANTING TO START OVER. ON THE OTHER, THE SECOND AND ALL THE STORIES YOU BROUGHT HOME EVERY NIGHT. IN THE END, I JUST SAT THERE LISTENING TO WHAT HE HAD TO SAY.

I'M HERE UNDER POLITICAL ASYLUM.

HE SAID.

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO APPLY FOR CITIZENSHIP?

YES, AFTER A GOOD, LONG CHECK INTO HIS BACKGROUND.

YOU ACTUALLY GRANTED HIM CITIZENSHIP?

AFTER ALL, THAT'S MY JOB.

THERE IS NO LAW ON THE BOOKS SAYING I SHOULDN'T AND EVERY LAW SAYING I SHOULD.

SAYING NO WOULD BE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST RACE, WOULDN'T IT?

IT STILL SURPRISED ME WHEN HE CAME IN TWO MONTHS AFTER HIS PAPERS WENT THROUGH. HE HAD IN TOW A GARGOYLE WHO WISHED CITIZENSHIP LIKE SHARRDAN.

I PROCESSED HIM JUST LIKE HIS FRIEND.

AS TIME WENT ON, MORE AND MORE CAME UNTIL I PRACTICALLY HAD A LINE OUT THE DOOR.

I ASKED THEM ALL WHY THEY WOULD WANT TO LEAVE THEIR HOMELAND.

EACH AND EVERY ONE REPLIED THE SAME. FEAR. FEAR FOR THEIR LIVES, FEAR FOR THEIR CHILDREN'S LIVES, FEAR OF THE FUTURE, FEAR THAT THEY HAD NO FUTURE.

THE DEMON LANDS ARE OVERCROWDED. THEY'VE TAXED THEIR RESOURCES TO THE LIMITS.

STARVATION IS RUNNING RAMPANT LIKE A PLAGUE.

AND THOSE IN CHARGE ARE SO WRAPPED UP IN THEIR DRACONIAN POLITICS, THEY DON'T CARE WHAT'S HAPPENING BELOW THEM.

WHEN SHARRDAN APPROACHED ME ABOUT STARTING AN UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FOR HIS PEOPLE, HOW COULD I REFUSE.

YOU'VE ACTUALLY BEEN HELPING HIM SMUGGLE PEOPLE INTO MEGA-SHAMMARK?!?

NOT INTO MEGA-SHAMMARK. I'M GETTING THEM OUT OF THE DEMON LANDS. IT'S ALL BEEN QUITE LEGAL ON NIVARRIA'S END. MANY OF THEM HAVE SET UP IN DALEPORT, CREATING A "DEMON BUROUGH", IF YOU WILL. OTHERS HAVE GONE TO HALISPA SEEKING ASYLUM THERE.

MOST OF THE DEMONS YOU HAVE TO DEAL WITH ARE LORD SHEILBA'S SOLDIERS FROM BYLON, TRYING TO SMUGGLE GOODS AND TECHNOLOGY BACK HERE. WITH HIS TERRITORY CLOSEST TO THE DIMENSIONAL BOUNDARY, HE SEES GREAT POLITICAL ADVANTAGE BY BRINGING THIS STUFF THROUGH.

IF THAT'S THE CASE, WHY DOESN'T THIS "LORD SHEILBA" MAKE A DEAL WITH ONE OF THE THIRD-WORLD COUNTRIES OR THE MAFIA? WHEN IT COMES TO SMUGGLING, DEMONS HAVE BEEN PRETTY CLUELESS.

I DON'T KNOW. MAYBE HE FEELS LIKE HE'D LOSE HIS POWER BASE. MAYBE HIS *IS* CLUELESS.

ALL I KNOW IS THAT THIS PLACE IS ALL MESSED UP AND GOOD PEOPLE WANT OUT.

I DON'T BLAME THEM. I WANT TO HELP THEM. I KNOW I CAN'T HELP EVERYONE, BUT I HAVE TO TRY.

BUT IT'S SO HARD TO REMEMBER THAT . . .

WHEN YOU COME HOME EACH NIGHT WITH YOUR LITTLE HORROR STORIES FROM YOUR WAR WITH LORD SHEILBA'S CRONIES.

I'M SORRY, HONEY. I SHOULD HAVE TOLD YOU ALL THIS A LONG TIME AGO.

IT'S NOT LIKE I GAVE YOU *MUCH* OF A CHANCE.

HOLLY, THIS TIES INTO THE CONCERT AT DALEPORT, DOESN'T IT?

IN A ROUND-ABOUT WAY.

SHARRDAN'S THE LEAD GUITAR OF NOSFERHATU HOVERCRAFT.

THE SUCCUBUS WHO STOLE THE TICKETS WAS WORKING FOR LORD SHEILBA?

YES. HER NAME IS TARLOÖM.

SHE WAS UNDER DIRECT ORDERS TO FIND SHARRDAN.

I TAKE IT THERE IS VERY BAD BLOOD BETWEEN SHEILBA AND SHARRDAN?

SHARRDAN HAS NO LOVE LOST FOR HIS FATHER....

FATHER?

YES, FATHER. AND I THINK SHEILBA HAS TAKEN OFFENSE AT SHARRDAN'S UNDERGROUND. ENOUGH TO CONTEMPLATE GETTING RID OF SHARRDAN ALTOGETHER.

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT SHEILBA WILL KILL SHARRDAN AT THE CONCERT?

I KNOW HE'LL TRY.

HOLLY, THINK HARD ON WHAT YOU'RE SAYING.

WHILE YOU WERE POSSESSED BY TARLOÖM, DID SHEILBA STATE IN YOUR PRESENCE THAT HE PLANED TO KILL SHARRDAN?

NO . . . NOT IN SO MANY WORDS . . . WHY? DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE A CASE AGAINST HIM?

NOT YET. BUT I JUST MIGHT IF WHAT WE CAN SOMEHOW CONFIRM WHAT YOU JUST TOLD ME.

BUT ALL THIS INFO WON'T DO US, OR SHARRDAN, ANY GOOD IF WE CAN'T GET OUT OF THESE DEMON LANDS.

THAT, LORD SHEILBA, WILL PENETRATE EVEN THE STRONGEST OF SHIELD SPELLS.

EXCELLENT WORK, TAHEE. YOU'VE ERECTED THE SHIELD AROUND THE COURTYARD AS I REQUESTED?

YES, MY LORD.

TAHEE, YOU SHOULD PRAISE KALISHKA EVERY TURN THAT YOUR WIFE WAS SACRIFICED BEFORE YOUR CHILD WAS BORN.

CHILDREN ARE NOTHING BUT MISERY.

AGAIN, YOU EARN YOUR TITLE OF SORCERER PRIMUS.

AH, TARLOÖM. REPORT.

I WAS UNABLE TO FIND SHARRDAN'S CURRENT LOCATION.

HOWEVER, I DID FIND OUT WHERE HE WILL BE IN TWO DAYS' TIME.

HE IS GIVING SOME SORT OF PERFORMANCE IN A CITY NEAR THE DIMENSIONAL BOUNDARY.

YOU HAVE MADE ARRANGEMENTS TO VIEW THIS PERFORMANCE OF HIS?

YES, LORD SHEILBA. I'VE ACQUIRED FOUR PASSES.

YOU'VE DONE WELL, TARLOÖM.

YOU AND TWO OF MY PERSONAL GUARDS WILL ACCOMPANY ME. THEN I WILL BE RID OF THIS PROBLEM AND BE BACK TO WHAT I SHOULD BE DOING.

HOWEVER, THERE IS ANOTHER SITUATION THAT HAS HAPPENED. I WAS FORCED BACK INTO THE DEMON LANDS EARLIER THAN EXPECTED BY A . . .

. . . A . . . TWO-LEGGED UNICORN. AND HE, UM, FOLLOWED ME.

WHAT! A TWO-LEGGED! *HERE?*

FORGIVE ME, MY LORD. I WAS ABLE TO LOSE HIM IN THE VALLEY OF STONE TO THE EAST. BUT HE IS NO FOOL. I'M SURE HE HAS MOVED FROM THERE SINCE.

YOU FOOL!

DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU HAVE DONE!?!

FIND HIM!

TAKE EVERYONE IN THE PALACE AND FIND HIM!

I WILL HAVE HIS HEAD LAID AT MY FEET BEFORE WE LEAVE OR I WILL HAVE YOURS!

I OBEY, MY LORD.

GET OUT OF MY SIGHT!

FIRST MY SON, NOW DOURAN'S CURSE! WHAT NEXT?!

BAM!

BAM! BAM! BAM!

M.C.L.U.

HEY COGGS. WHAT'S THE STATUS?

SGT. SAKI.

NO SIGN OF THE SUCCUBUS THEY WERE TRYING TO CATCH.

THOUGH WHEN WE DO GET HER, WE HAVE A REALLY STRONG CASE OF ATTEMPTED MANSLAUGHTER TO THROW ON TOP OF HER OTHER CHARGES.

GOOD WORK.

THOUGH, I WISH LT. BUTTERCUP WAS HERE. WE NEED SOMEONE WHO CAN DETECT MANA FIELDS.

WHAT?

YOU MEAN AMARK ISN'T HERE?

NO, ISN'T HE AT THE HOSPITAL WITH SGT. STONEBREAKER?

IIE. I JUST CAME FROM THE HOSPITAL.

IS THAT CORNER BEING USED IN THE INVESTIGATION?

NO, MA'AM.

I'LL GET ON THE HORN AND SEE IF HE'S AT HOME.

GOOD THINKING. I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO HERE ABOUT THE FIELDS.

TELL ERMIN TO GRAB THE CAMERA.

GOT THE CAMERA!

GOOD.

DAMN IT, AMARK. PLEASE BE HOME

PLEASE BE HOME . . .

LOOKS LIKE WE GOT OURSELVES A BONA FIDE GATE.

HOLLY, SOMETHING'S GOING ON.

THE PATROLS HAVE INCREASED.

I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN.

WHERE ARE THESE "FRIENDS" OF YOURS?

I DON'T KNOW.... THEY SHOULD HAVE BEEN HERE BY NOW.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'RE AFTER, BUT WE SHOULD MOVE.

THIS PLACE IS TOO HOT.

AND THE WARDS HERE AREN'T STRONG ENOUGH TO HAMPER A THOROUGH SEARCH.

YOU'RE RIGHT. LET'S GO.

DEAR, I'D FEEL BETTER IF YOU HAD THIS.

I CAN RELY ON MY MAGIC SKILLS.

I CAN DO THIS. BACK DOOR'S THIS WAY.

<WHAT WAS THAT?>

<LET'S CHECK>

CRASH
TINKLE
TINKLE
TINKLE

AS LONG AS THEY DON'T HAVE A MAGE, WE SHOULD GET CEAR OF THE AREA WITHOUT A PROBLEM.

There is nothing here for you.

MAKE A RIGHT AT THE CORNER.

<Magic Break!>

(SIR!)

WRONG TURN!


(KILL THE TWO-LEGGER!)


TURN 'ROUND...




BOOM!


Sisters of mercy, shield us!


OUTTA MY WAY!
KA-ZOT!

Rise, O earth. Fortify thy stone wall.

DEAD END!

RUMBLE RUMBLE

I DON'T KNOW WHETHER TO BE MAD OR THANKFUL FOR THESE CRAMPED STREETS.

(ROUND THE BLOCK!)

(NOW!)

THEY CAN ONLY HIT US ONE TO TWO AT A TIME.

THAT'S THE IDEA.

LEAD ON.

FLYERS.

I SEE 'EM.

THIS WAY. THERE'S A COVERED MARKET WHERE THE MAGE FLYERS CAN'T HIT US FROM THE AIR.

GOOD THINKING!

(SEND A RUNNER. WE NEED REINFORCEMENTS.)

ANOTHER BLOCK, THEN LEFT.

GOTCHA.

<YOU'RE LATE, MAGE.>

<Anger and spite, boil forth, crying with pain and destruction.>

<Bring thy fiery wave against those who stand before us.>

Sisters of mercy...

Shield us!

KRA-FOOSHA!

OOF!

SMACK!

AH!

OH, GOD...

...THEY KILLED EVERYONE ON THE STREET...

Gentle spirits of wind, turn thy soul to fury...

...Thy bodies become scythes.

Let those who anger you feel thy harpy's talons.

<Vengeful light come to mine hand...>

TA-CRACK!

=PANT=
THAT SHOULD BY US SOME TIME TO GET OUT OF HERE...
=PANT=

...HOLLY?

NO...

OH, GOD... NO...

TO BE CONTUNIUED

The Mana Police and the Bureau of Mana Investigation

By Smudge and Dave Bryant

It was drought that led to the rise of modern policing on Nivarria.

More than a century ago, Shammark County was on the verge of starvation; hot dry summers shrank rivers and dying vegetation could not hold topsoil, which flowed to the bay and silted up the harbor.

Food was shipped in and ferried to dock by flat-bottom barges. Ad hoc procedures began to develop as folk congregated to offload food for distribution. Stifling heat, jostling, and uncertain tempers made for restive crowds.

A visiting official was accosted as he passed by part of the crowd, who shouted queries and demands. Unnerved, he fled to the nearby temporary barracks of a Republican unit and poured out a breathless account to the officer of the day.

The young lieutenant rounded up his platoon and double-timed it, ready for trouble. By then, cargoes had begun to arrive, and the milling throngs looked threatening to the inexperienced officer. He deployed his confused men in a skirmish line and advanced; the crowd was bewildered by this turn. Accounts of succeeding events vary, but a shot was fired, sparking a volley from the platoon.

The very riot the unit had come to prevent then erupted. A handful died by gunshot or trampling, scores were injured, parts of the platoon fled. A curfew was slapped down and a tense quiet settled.

Investigations, courts-martial, and dismissals followed. There were changes in Shammark County's relationship with the Republic and in the Count's guard. The lessons learned from the failures of a military unit in a peacekeeping role led to the Shammark County Police Department.

In the decades after, the department grew, becoming a model for similar agencies. At first the return of the magic was of little concern, but crimes involving magic grew frequent enough that some officers were assigned to "crimes of the bizarre".

Historians had debated the existence of the golem named Joni. Archaeologists proved at least some of Joni's legend was accurate when they found his tomb. The contents went on tour to many places, including Shammark County.

The Shammark venue, near rivers and creeks that flowed to the bay, was suffused with enough magic to jump-start the spell that animated Joni. Disoriented and inquisitive, the golem found his way from his display cabinet into the city.

The police were baffled until Joni came forward. No one remained in doubt about the resurgence of magic, least of all the Shammark County Police Department. The "bizarre crimes" detail mushroomed into a division, the Mana Police.

It was not many more years before Shammark County was shaken to the foundations by the great asteroid strike. The entire department was stretched thin, forced to draw personnel and resources ruthlessly. Even so, some dedicated officers of the Mana Police worked overtime, trying to investigate a magical crime of unprecedented proportions.

The decision was made that the Mana Police needed an investigative capability. Once the urgency of recovery efforts abated, the renamed Mega-Shammark Police Department organized a new office in the Mana Police: the Bureau of Mana Investigation (BMI).



Today, the Mana Police and BMI are busy indeed. Still, standards are high; no one can transfer to the Mana Police without at least a couple of years' experience, and BMI selects only from the Mana Police. As a result, BMI is small, a half-dozen or so investigators and a cadre of support personnel.


BARON ENGEL 01